

## REVIEW OF *SEER 2.0: SPANISH ENGLISH EDUCATION RESOURCES*

<b>Title</b>	<i>SEER 2.0</i>
<b>Platforms</b>	PC or compatible; Windows 98SE, NT 4, 2000, or XP
<b>System requirements</b>	Microsoft Windows 98SE, NT 4, 2000, or XP, and Tablet XP; A minimum of 128 MB RAM and 60 MB of free hard disk space is required; speakers are needed for audio; CD drive and Internet access recommended
<b>Publisher</b>	SEER Education Corporation 5105 Trailwest, Suite 101 Austin, Texas 78735 USA <a href="http://www.seeredu.com">http://www.seeredu.com</a>
<b>Support offered</b>	Tel(512) 632-4954 or (866) 885-6902 E-mail: <a href="mailto:support@seeredu.com">support@seeredu.com</a>
<b>Target language</b>	Spanish-English
<b>Target audience</b>	Beginner-intermediate level
<b>Price</b>	Complete <i>SEER</i> product: US\$ 279.00, individually. Can be purchased online at <a href="http://www.seeredu.com">http://www.seeredu.com</a>

Review by Corinne Bossé, Athabasca University

### OVERVIEW

*SEER* (Spanish English Education Resources) version 2.0 is a software that offers bilingual language learning resources for English-Spanish translation. The product can be downloaded from the Word Magic company site (<http://www.seeredu.com>) and it is also available on a CD-Rom format. According to the user's manual, *SEER* is an integrated reference resource for use in English and Spanish language learning and education environments, and for assisting with immediate bilingual communication needs. The intended audience consists of individual users from various educational settings (formal or informal), business professionals, and self-directed learners.

The Spanish-English language learning software is organized around five key linguistic components: *SEER* Dictionary, Synonyms, Verbs, Expressions, and the *SEER* Translator. It also includes Instant Access modules which provide shortcuts that allow users to quickly access the dictionary, translations, synonyms, and conjugations from a word processor, Web browser, or e-mail system by clicking on a given word.


### DESCRIPTION

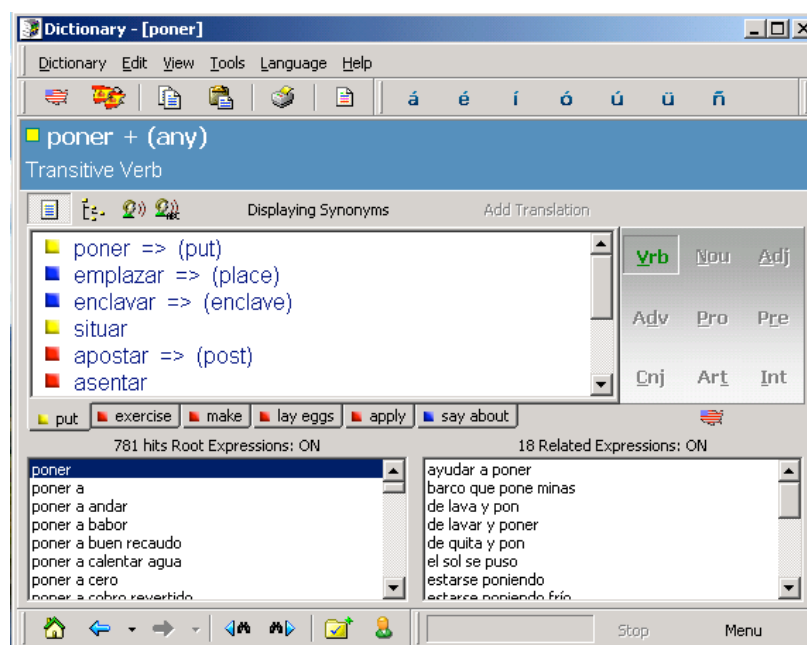
The main menu of *SEER* allows access to the purchased modules of the product.



The "map" button allows the user to select either English or Spanish as the preferred language interface for all displayed texts. By clicking on this button the user can switch language at anytime from the main menu or within a selected module. Once a word is entered in the **Current Word** field, the user can gain various types of grammatical information by selecting one of the five linguistic modules.

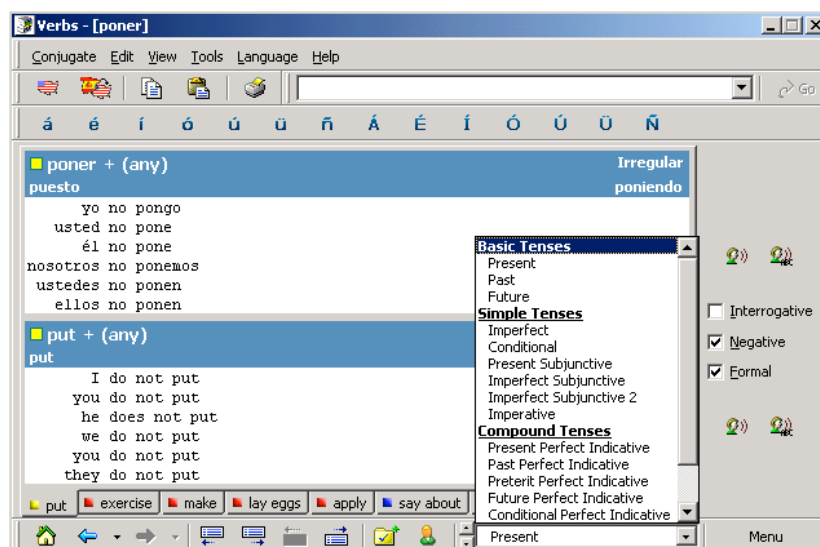
### Dictionary and Synonyms

In these modules, users have access to numerous bilingual learning resources offered by *SEER*'s digital dictionary. They can specify their defaults for the dictionary by opting for a **Normal** or **Tree** view, for **Translations** or **Synonyms** display, and for using English or Spanish **Meanings**. The **Synonyms** option includes displaying root expressions and related expressions for the selected word. These options can be changed within module during a given session. Colour coding is used to identify parts of speech. This graphical element can help language learners notice grammatical characteristics and functions of the word that they selected during a session. There are also sound icons  that enable users to listen to the Spanish or English pronunciation of their selected terms. These multimedia features are recurrent throughout other *SEER*'s modules.



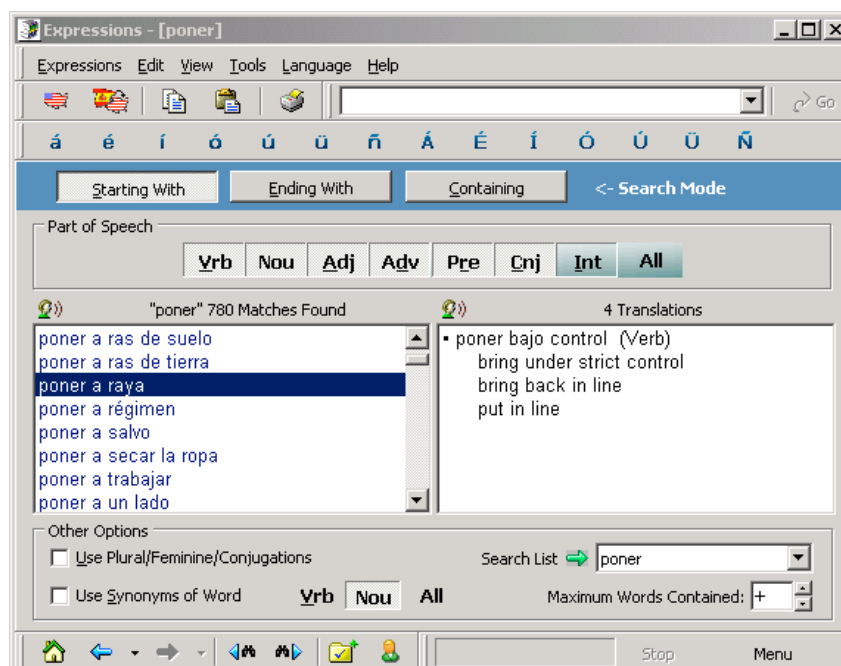
## Verbs

SEER's Verbs section contains numerous English and Spanish verb conjugations that allow the user to display the language equivalent of the verb conjugation. Users can also enter any word in its conjugated verb form in English or Spanish and get the root verb, tense and person. The **Negative**, **Interrogative**, and **Formal** options enable users to be exposed and to notice various reiterations of their selected verb format. They can also specify the default conjugation to be displayed.



## Expressions

SEER's Expressions module contains multiple search features that allow the user to quickly find many different uses and connotations of the given word or phrase. Users can enter a word and specify whether they want expressions that start with the word, end with it or contain it. They can also specify the part of speech they desire for the given word and other options such as use of Plural, Synonyms, and the maximum number of words the displayed phrases should contain..



## Translator

Users can specify translation default settings, such as, formal/informal address (*tú* or *usted*), masculine/feminine gender, and singular/plural author number. They can also select advanced translation options such as activating Literal Proper Nouns for the automated translation of a textual passage. The configuration of the translation settings reflects a bias toward Latin American context without necessarily taking into consideration the use of Spanish in the Iberic peninsular context.

## EVALUATION

The overall consistency of *SEER*'s interface design facilitates the navigation of the linguistic software. The simplicity of the graphical aspects of the interface design as well as the similar pull down menu bar functions of each module makes it easier for users to concentrate on the five main linguistic components of the software. One technical weakness is the quality of the given vocabulary pronunciation, which can be choppy or robotic at times. Another area that needs to be improved in future versions of *SEER* will be the inclusion of better gender representation across its pronunciation sections.

A review of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) literature of the past decade suggests that use of visual media support vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension (Liu, Moore, Graham, & Lee, 2003). From that evaluation standpoint, *SEER*'s multimodal presentations across its five main linguistic components allow users to access and acquire vocabulary in a flexible manner. The multimedia features of *SEER* can also reinforce the acquisition of lexical item by supporting users' mental representation of all its grammatical nature which include its orthophonic, phonemic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic and stylistic/use characteristics (Van de Poel & Swanepoel, 2003). Therefore, the added redundancy in the interface design of *SEER* might allow language learners to receive help in comprehending semantic and syntactic aspects of linguistic input (Chapelle, 1998).

One of *SEER*'s strongest features consists in providing users with both definitional and contextual information about words. This is considered to be one of the main principles that appear to underlie effective vocabulary teaching (Coady, 1997; Grace, 1998; Van de Poel & Swanepoel, 2003). The multiple exposures to words included across *SEER*'s five linguistic sections is another step toward strengthening language vocabulary acquisition by enabling learners to process information about words at a deeper level (Coady, 1997; Van de Poel & Swanepoel, 2003).

From a cognitivist perspective, the design of *SEER* user interface supports a limited range of cognitive processes involved in the development of linguistic and pragmatic skills and competencies in SLA (Chapelle, 1998; Plass, 1998). It mostly facilitates the process of decoding the linguistic surface structure of the vocabulary item (Plass) by providing textual and auditory bilingual language learning resources. However, recent CALL literature in effective lexical support highlights that word comprehension does not predict correct use of a word (Van de Poel & Swanepoel, 2003). Therefore a potential weakness of using *SEER* is that it might encourage passive/receptive knowledge of vocabulary which does not tend to translate in long-term retention.

A potential cognitive benefit is the fact that *SEER* bi-directional translation resources can assist learners with verification of meaning when learning L2 vocabulary in the use of L1 translations which might facilitate greater retention of the correct word meanings (Grace, 1998). Moreover, *SEER* provides automatic lexical access to an extensive Spanish-English digital thesaurus and database of idiomatic expressions that help users derive cultural meaning of some terms. It would be useful to include idiomatic expressions that reflect to a greater extent the rich socio-cultural linguistic diversity of the Hispanic community.

Sentence level translation is provided and works relatively well for basic understanding of the target language. There is an attempt in *SEER* to go beyond literal translation by enabling users to select some

advanced translation options, but it can be a laborious process for beginners. In addition, the automated translation of a textual passage that contains various idiomatic expressions and/or complex syntactical constructions can produce awkward results at a semantic level. In that regard, the quality of translation of *SEER 2.0* corresponds to inherent limitations of current electronic translation software with respect to advanced and complex semantic characteristics.

## SUMMARY

*SEER's* bi-directional multimedia software provides definitional and contextual information about Spanish-English lexical items that can be used stand-alone or as part of vocabulary instruction to complement L2 instruction. It can be particularly helpful to assist beginner and intermediate language learners in reinforcing vocabulary on their own time by accommodating their individual needs despite some limitations. Through its modular approach to translation, *SEER's* user-friendly design provides a "just-in-time" linguistic reference tool that makes it valuable in various educational and professional settings.

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## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Corinne Bossé has an MA in Educational Technology from Concordia University (Montreal, Canada). She is an Instructional Web Designer within the Department of Educational Media Development at Athabasca University-Canada's Open University. Her current projects involve the use of ICT in distance education language teaching.

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